

Message Text

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ACTION OES-06

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 NEA-10 ISO-00 DLOS-06 SAL-01 CG-00
DOTE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 FEA-01 AID-05 CEQ-01 CIAE-00
ERDA-05 COME-00 DODE-00 EB-08 EPA-01 INR-07 IO-13
L-03 NSF-01 NSC-05 NSAE-00 PM-04 USIA-06 SS-15
SP-02 INT-05 /115 W

-----220342Z 032806 /73

R 220442Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2909

INFO AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USLO PEKING

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TAIPEI 1553

TOKYO FOR RFA, MARITIME ATTACHE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: BWWT, SEVN, EFIS, TW

SUBJECT: OIL SPILL NEAR KEELUNG HARBOR

REF: TAIPEI 0875

1. ON FEBRUARY 15 KUWAITI TANKER BORAG SANK INTO DEEPER WATER, APPARENTLY BREAKING IN TWO. MAST AND BRIDGE ARE STILL VISIBLE AT LOW TIDE, HOWEVER. DESPITE CLAIM BY GROC 3RD DISTRICT NAVAL COMMAND SPOKESMAN THAT AREA OF SHIPWRECK HAD BEEN IDENTIFIED AS NAVIGATIONAL HAZARD, NO LIGHTED BUOYS WERE IN PLACE AS OF LATEST U.S. NAVAL ATTACHE REPORT. ON NIGHT OF MARCH 2 A DREDGER VALUED AT US\$60,000 RAMMED WRECKAGE OF BORAG AND SANK NEARBY. THERE WERE NO CASUALTIES, BUT VESSEL OWNERS ARE REPORTEDLY PLANNING TO FILE DAMAGE SUIT AGAINST KEELUNG HARBOR BUREAU FOR FAILURE TO MARK DANGER AREA.

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2. DIVERS WORKING FOR A DUTCH FIRM HAVE CLOSED VENTILATORS AND PLUGGED SOME HOLES IN HULL OF BORAG, CUTTING LEAKAGE DRASTICALLY. ABOUT HALF OF COMPARTMENTS AND CONTENTS ARE STILL INTACT. HOWEVER, OF ORIGINAL CARGO OF 30,000 TONS, AT LEAST A THIRD AND PROBABLY HALF HAS ALREADY ESCAPED TO POLLUTE 100 KILOMETERS OF NORTHERN TAIWANESE BEACHES AND HARBOR FACILITIES. ATTEMPTS TO PUMP REMAINDER OF OIL FROM BORAG ARE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN IN

APRIL, WHEN WEATHER IS EXPECTED TO IMPROVE. EFFORTS TO TRANSFER OIL TO BARGES SHORTLY AFTER BORAG STRUCK REEF AND BEFORE HULL HAD COMPLETELY SUBMERGED WERE DEFEATED BY HIGH WAVES, LOW WATER TEMPERATURE, HIGH VISCOSITY OF OIL, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, PLUS INEXPERIENCE AND APPARENT BUREAUCRATIC PROCRASTINATION AND BUCK-PASSING.

3. SHIPPING OPERATIONS AT KEELUNG HARBOR HAVE REMAINED VIRTUALLY UNAFFECTED, DESPITE CONSIDERABLE POLLUTION OF SHORELINE.

4. THERE IS NO LONGER A THREAT TO NEARBY POWER PLANT OPERATIONS, OWING TO FACT THAT COOLING WATER INTAKES ARE WELL BELOW SURFACE.

5. FISHING OPERATIONS FROM A WHOLE SERIES OF SMALL HARBORS IN NORTHERN TAIWAN HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY AFFECTED BY OIL SLICK, WHICH IS BEING HELD IN PLACE IN SOME LOCATIONS BY PREVAILING WIND. PORTIONS OF SLICK ARE EXTREMELY DENSE AND DIFFICULT TO HANDLE BY MECHANICAL MEANS. CHIEF METHOD OF REMOVING OIL FROM WATER HAS BEEN HAND-HELD SCOOPING DEVICES. YEHLIU FISHING PORT AND NEARBY SCENIC BEACH HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY HARD HIT. 52,000 BARRELS HAVE BEEN RECOVERED TO DATE, BUT CLEANUP EFFORTS WILL REQUIRE MANY MONTHS TO COMPLETE. EVEN WHERE FISHING CRAFT CAN BE OPERATED WITH NO DANGER TO ENGINES AND RUNNING GEAR, FISHERMEN ARE RELUCTANT TO RISK FOULING NETS BY OPERATING IN HEAVILY POLLUTED WATERS. FISHING ACTIVITIES ALSO HAVE BEEN HAMPERED BY DIVERSION OF PORTION OF FLEET--MOSTLY NON-MOTORIZED--TO COLLECT OIL, SPURRED BY US\$5.20 PER BARREL BOUNTY OFFERED BY GROC. MOST SERIOUS EFFECT OF SPILL, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN TO KILL MUCH OF COASTAL FISH POPULATION OR, MORE LIKELY, TO DRIVE SIGNIFICANT

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PORTION OF IT TO SEA TO SUFFICIENT DISTANCE THAT SMALL CRAFT ARE UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO BRAVE SEVERE WIND CONDITIONS AND HIGH WAVES OFTEN ENCOUNTERED THERE. FOR A TIME, ONLY 10 PERCENT OF THE NORMAL NORTHERN COASTAL CATCH SHOWED UP IN LOCAL MARKETS, AND CHIEF OF TAIPEI FISH MARKET ESTIMATES IT WILL BE AT LEAST A YEAR BEFORE SUPPLY RETURNS TO PRE-BORAG LEVELS. TAIPEI COUNTY OFFICIALS ESTIMATE THAT LIVELIHOODS OF ABOUT 13,000 FULL-TIME AND 18,000 PART-TIME FISHERMEN AND FAMILIES HAVE BEEN AT LEAST TEMPORARILY AFFECTED AND CLAIM THAT MOST OF THESE PEOPLE WILL REQUIRE MAJOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE. (FYI: TAIPEI COUNTY HAS 836 MOTORIZED AND 1536 NON-MOTORIZED FISHING VESSELS, FEW OF WHICH CAN SAFELY OPERATE FAR FROM COAST MUCH OF THE YEAR. TAIPEI COUNTY FISHERMEN LAST YEAR RETURNED FROM THE SEA WITH A CATCH OF 16,300 TONS OF FISH AND OTHER MARINE PRODUCTS WORTH ABOUT US\$12,000,000.)

6. SOME OF FISH AND SHELLFISH TAKEN FROM AFFECTED AREA HAVE SMELLED OF PETROLEUM, WHICH HAS DRIVEN DOWN MARKET PRICE BY AS MUCH AS TWO-THIRDS. THE NATIONAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATION AND

ASSOCIATED AGENCIES ARE CONDUCTING A STUDY TO DETERMINE EXTENT OF PROBLEM AND WHETHER TAINED FISH ARE DANGEROUSLY TOXIC OR MERELY NOT PALATABLE. FISHERIES BUREAU DIRECTOR STATES MEAT OF MOST OF CATCH IS UNCONTAMINATED DESPITE LARGE NUMBERS KILLED BY SLICK.

7. AREAS RATHER DISTANT FROM BORAG HAVE REPORTED SEVERE DAMAGE TO FINGERLINGS AND SHELLFISH, AND EVEN TO SUPPORTING ACQUATIC PLANT LIFE. HOWEVER, IT IS NOT YET POSSIBLE, NOR WILL IT BE FOR SOME TIME, TO GET AN ACCURATE ESTIMATE ON NUMBERS OF FISH AND SHELLFISH KILLED AND DRIVEN OFF, LET ALONE DAMAGE TO PLANKTON AND SEAWEED, DEGREE OF CONCENTRATION ALONG PREDATOR CHAIN OF POISONS NON-FATAL TO FISH BUT PERHAPS HARMFUL TO HUMANS EATING THE FISH, AND LIKELY LONG RANGE CHANGES IN THE ECOSYSTEM.

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L-03 NSF-01 NSC-05 NSAE-00 PM-04 USIA-06 SS-15
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-----220343Z 032878 /73

R 220442Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TAIPEI 1553

TOKYO FOR RFA, MARITIME ATTACHE

8. GROC SPOKESMEN HAVE ESTIMATED DAMAGE FROM SPILL TO FISHERY RESOURCES AND ACTIVITY ALONE AT MORE THAN US\$26,000,000. HOWEVER, TAIWAN FISHERIES BUREAU DIRECTOR HAS TOLD EMBASSY THAT FINAL COST IS LIKELY TO BE MUCH HIGHER AFTER DAMAGE TO FLORA AND FAUNA HAS BEEN MORE ACCURATELY GUAGED AND COSTS OF CLEAN-UP PAST AND FUTURE ADDED IN. LONG-TERM ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE IS AT BEST EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO ASSESS AND IT MAY REQUIRE MANY MONTHS OR EVEN YEARS FOR PROPER ACQUISITION AND STUDY OF DATA. EVEN

EFFECTS ON TOURISM AT POLLUTED BEACHES CANNOT BE ESTIMATED UNTIL OIL HAS CEASED DRIFTING, COMPREHENSIVE ON-SITE INVESTIGATIONS CONDUCTED, AND CLEAN-UP COMPLETED.

9. AT LEAST TWO MAJOR GROC INTERAGENCY COMMITTEES HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED TO COORDINATE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT AND CLEAN-UP. THE HIGHER LEVEL BODY, UNDER THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS, IS CONCENTRATING ON COLLECTION OF DATA TO BE USED IN PRESSING CLAIMS AGAINST SHIPOWNER/INSURERS--AND POSSIBLY KUWAITI GOVERN-
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MENT. ANOTHER SUBORDINATE TASK FORCE, UNDER MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS DIRECTION, IS CHARGED WITH COUNTERING EFFECTS OF SLICK AND ASSESSING ECOLOGICAL DAMAGE. THERE HAS ALREADY BEEN SOME FRICTION BETWEEN NATIONAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS AND COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER ON PRIORITIES, WITH FORMER ACCUSING LATTER OF WASTING TIME TRYING TO ABSOLVE HIMSELF OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR BORAG DISASTER INSTEAD OF PRESSING ON WITH MORE URGENT AND PRACTICAL MATTER OF DEALING PHYSICALLY WITH OIL SLICK BEFORE IT DOES EVEN MORE DAMAGE.

10. A BOARD OF INQUIRY, COMPOSED OF CHINESE NAVY OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS OF KEELUNG HARBOR, HAS FOUND THE BORAG'S CAPTAIN, 33-YEAR-OLD FRENCH-BORN MICHEL HASCOET, RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SHIPWRECK. HE IS REPORTEDLY NOT TO BE ALLOWED TO LEAVE TAIWAN UNTIL ISSUE OF DAMAGES HAD BEEN RESOLVED TO GROC SATISFACTION.

11. AMERICAN NAVAL OBSERVERS VISITING KEELUNG HAVE BEEN CRITICAL OF APPARENT INACTIONS AND PROCRASTINATIONS OF SOME GROC ORGANS. ALTHOUGH THE WEEKEND OF FEBRUARY 12 AND 13--BEFORE BORAG'S HULL HAD SLIPPED BENEATH THE WAVES--WAS CALM, EMBASSY ASSISTANT NAVAL ATTACHE REPORTED THAT NOT ONE VESSEL WAS TO BE SEEN NEAR WRECK, EITHER TO PUMP OUT OIL, OR TO TRY TO SEAL MINOR LEAKS, OR TO COMBAT SPREADING OF OIL SLICK. IN PARTIAL MITIGATION, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT 1) THIS WAS FIRST ACCIDENT OF ITS KIND IN TAIWANESE WATERS, AND 2) GIVEN NO CONTINGENCY PLAN, SUITABLE EQUIPMENT, OR ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR DEALING WITH SUCH EMERGENCIES, MANY AND PERHAPS MOST OF THE PEOPLE INVOLVED, PARTICULARLY THE CHINESE NAVY AND KEELUNG HARBOR BUREAU, APPEAR TO HAVE DONE A FAIRLY CREDITABLE JOB OF PULLING THINGS TOGETHER AFTER THE INITIAL HIATUS. GROC OFFICIALS WERE IN FACT PRAISED FOR THEIR EFFORTS BY SOME FOREIGN SALVAGE EXPERTS. ADDITIONALLY, WEATHER CONDITIONS WERE AT TIMES SUCH THAT NOT EVEN THE BEST OF EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES COULD HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE. ROUGH SEAS, IN PARTICULAR, GREATLY COMPLICATED MATTERS, RENDERING EVEN LARGE SEA-BOOMS IMPORTED FROM HONG KONG ALMOST USELESS FOR CONTAINING SLICK. NEVERTHELESS, IT IS
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OBVIOUS THAT GROC WAS ALMOST COMPLETELY UNPREPARED TECHNICALLY, ORGANIZATIONALLY, OR PROCEDURALLY, TO REACT QUICKLY AND EFFECTIVELY TO A MAJOR OIL SPILL, AND THAT MUCH OF WHATEVER DAMAGE HAS OCCURRED AND IS YET TO OCCUR NEED NOT HAVE, HAD THE GROC BEEN PROPERLY EQUIPPED AND ADMINISTRATIVELY PREPARED IN ADVANCE.

12. U.S. HELP HAS BEEN SOLICITED IN THE FORM OF 1) ADVICE AS TO CLEANUP DETERGENTS SUITABLE FOR BEACHES BUT NOT TOXIC TO MARINE LIFE, AND 2) PROVISION OF DATA ON LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF SANTA BARBARA SPILL. EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING SUCH INFORMATION FROM DEPARTMENT.
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Message Attributes

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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
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Disposition History: n/a
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Executive Order: GS
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